

## “Turning Ourselves” *Fripp, Bennett, Gurdjieff*

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### Abstract

In 1974, Robert Fripp—leader of the progressive rock group King Crimson—had a spiritual experience in which “the top of [his] head blew off.” He became a student of J. G. Bennett, himself a former student of G. I. Gurdjieff, at Sherborne House in Gloucestershire, and remains a member of the Bennett Foundation to this day. When Fripp returned to the music industry, it was with an approach that favored disciplined and geometric compositions over the jagged improvisation of the earlier period. This article explores the influence of Gurdjieff and Bennett’s teaching upon Fripp and his work, and his apparent attempts to realize the former’s idea of “objective art” through his music. I pay particular attention to the development of Guitar Craft, in which Fripp applies Gurdjieff’s techniques through the teaching of the guitar. I argue that Fripp’s teaching is a little examined scion of the Gurdjieff lineage, and a case study of discrete cultural production.

### Keywords

Robert Fripp – G. I. Gurdjieff – J. G. Bennett – Fourth Way – progressive rock

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Spirituality is not identical with religion. The artist, who looks for a quality in his art that this world cannot give, is a spiritual man even if he denies religion.

BENNETT, *A Spiritual Psychology* 9

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## I Introduction

In 1974, Robert Fripp, the phlegmatic guitarist and leader of the progressive rock group King Crimson, claimed that "the top of [his] head blew off" while reading the First Inaugural Address of J. G. Bennett. Bennett, a former student of G. I. Gurdjieff, had recently died, but Fripp nevertheless went to his Institute at Sherborne for ten months, and remains involved with the Bennett Foundation to the present day. When Fripp returned to the music industry in the late 1970s, it was with an approach that favored disciplined and geometric compositions over the jagged improvisation of the earlier period. This article explores the influence of Gurdjieff and Bennett's teaching upon Fripp and his work, and his apparent attempts to realize the former's idea of "objective art" through his music. I pay particular attention to the development of Guitar Craft, in which Fripp applies Gurdjieff's techniques through the teaching of the guitar. I argue that Fripp is a teacher in the Gurdjieff lineage, via Bennett, and his teaching a little-examined scion of the Gurdjieff lineage. In essence, to quote Fripp's friend and former teacher Anthony Blake, Guitar Craft introduces people to Fourth Way ideas "without using any of its traditional jargon and with hardly any reference to Gurdjieff himself."<sup>1</sup>

The aim is not, however, to argue that Fripp is a "rightful" or "legitimate" successor; I have no interest in such a normative argument. My involvement rather is my long-term interest in both progressive rock and alternative religious currents, and therefore hopeless attraction to areas where the two intersect. The article is intended as a case study of cultural production, tracing the cultural transmission of ideas along lines that are not immediately obvious to the historian of contemporary religion. Gurdjieff's is perhaps the least visible of the three major lineages of alternative religion that emerged from the *fin de siècle*—the others being Theosophy and the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn—but case studies such as this show that the Fourth Way has had a much greater, if discrete, influence upon contemporary popular culture than is generally understood.

Fripp himself is typically gnomic on the relationship between Guitar Craft and the teaching of Bennett and Gurdjieff:

Bob Gerber's formulation, given at the GC Course in Lebanon this past March in response to ... a student, with Ben Bennett [Bennett's son] sitting

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<sup>1</sup> 245. In fact, as Tamm records, Gurdjieffian terms were employed at early Guitar Craft seminars (189).

just behind him, was this: Guitar Craft is a manifestation of the Bennett line of the Gurdjieff Work.

At Claymont Court, in the beginning period of Guitar Craft, a senior resident & Movements instructor (now with The Foundation in NYC), said of Guitar Craft: Guitar Craft is not the Work! Around the same period, Elizabeth Bennett [Bennett's widow] was visiting Claymont and, on the visit when she smashed the bust of JGB, Elizabeth commented at a meeting of the Board: the only work going on here is Guitar Craft.

My own view, on this day in this place, also made at Claymont some twenty years ago: Guitar Craft is not the Work. It is a way of working.<sup>2</sup>

Nevertheless, this article will demonstrate a number of clear ways in which Fripp's work is indebted to Bennett's transmission of Gurdjieff's ideas. These include the style of teaching at Guitar Craft seminars; division of attention; the creation of situations to break habits and allow for "self-remembering"; of the necessity of "conscious suffering" for personal development; and the idea of music as a universal language. First, however, I need to introduce our three players.

## II Gurdjieff and the Fourth Way

This article assumes a certain familiarity with Gurdjieff and his teaching. However, some readers will be more interested in Fripp, so a short introduction to Gurdjieff's life, work, and ideas is included. More detailed information is available in James Webb's *The Harmonious Circle* (1980) and James Moore's biography, *Gurdjieff: Anatomy of a Myth* (1991); for details of his cosmological ideas, see P. D. Ouspensky's *In Search of the Miraculous* (1949).

George Ivanovich Gurdjieff was a Greek-Armenian teacher and author, and one of a number of "Eastern Guru" figures who emerged in the latter years of the nineteenth century.<sup>3</sup> Claiming to have been initiated by a number of mysterious adepts in remote parts of Asia, he offered a confusingly complex, incomplete and ever-changing set of teachings which he described as a synthesis of the three traditional methods towards enlightenment. These traditional methods were described by Gurdjieff as those of the Yogi (based on practices of the control of the mind), the Monk (control of the emotions) and the Fakir (control

2 <https://www.dgmlive.com/diaries.htm?entry=2198> (accessed 23/08/2016).

3 Other examples include Madame Blavatsky, Swami Vivekananda, and D. T. Suzuki.

of the body). His teachings purported to present a fourth route which harmonized each of these areas of control, and indeed, the Fourth Way is often used to denote the whole of his teachings (Blake 239). Alternatively, it is referred to as "the Work."

Gurdjieff taught that human beings were fundamentally sleep-walkers, moving unconsciously through life driven by largely by habits and other simple reactions. He described humans as "three-brained beings"; that is, with three separate centers controlling us—the intellectual, emotional and bodily—each of which acts independently and often in contradictory directions. Nevertheless, humans can develop "objective reason" which coordinates the three centers and allows us to develop higher, more subtle centers, though not without considerable cost. It requires "conscious suffering," that is, the deliberate putting of oneself in challenging situations in order to observe one's reactions and break through habitual, conditioned behavior patterns. Gurdjieff's expression "The Terror of the Situation" signifies both humanity's precariousness and our conscious recognition of it (Wellbeloved 203). This process is described as "work upon oneself," and is the practical thrust of Gurdjieff's teachings. However, with objective reason, one can achieve apparently miraculous results, including the creation of an immortal etheric body.

The Work was taught to his students in a number of situations, most famously perhaps being the Prieuré in Fontainebleau where Gurdjieff ran the Institute for the Harmonious Development of Man from 1922–1924 (officially, although unofficially teaching continued until 1932). Here, resident students were taught a series of "sacred dances" called the Movements, received lectures on cosmology, as well as carrying out housework, building projects and other mundane practical work. Tamm neatly outlines the various aspects of The Work as carried out by Gurdjieff's groups: Relaxation, Movements, Division of Attention, Co-ordination of the 'Centers' (moving, thinking and emotional), Abstract Symbolism, and Conditions (that is, that the role of the teacher was to create conditions in which the student could grow for themselves) (90–92). We will return to these categories later. Gurdjieff was apparently attempting to have the students develop each of their centers in parallel, to produce "harmonious development." At the same time, however, he was putting students into deliberately difficult situations in order to create the necessary conditions for work upon oneself, although it seems that his magisterial, mercurial, and manipulative personal character may well have produced such situations regardless.

This approach to personal development tied into his larger cosmological ideas. For Gurdjieff, everything in the Universe—man, animals, even rocks, but also planets, suns, and solar systems—was striving to develop to an ever-higher, more rarefied state. In essence, for Gurdjieff, the universe is a machine for cre-

ating spiritual beings. In what he termed “The Law of Reciprocal Maintenance” each class of being eats the products of the previous class and transmutes it to the food of the next class—for example, plants transform minerals into food for animals, which in turn become food for humans, and so on. But Gurdjieff extends this through the entire cosmos, with humans producing emotions which are “food for the moon” in its development towards being a planet. Ultimately, all beings are stages in the feeding and maintenance of the universe as a whole (Wellbeloved 119).

Two “laws” govern this process of transmutation and development. The first, which might be considered a variation of the Hegelian dialectic, is called the Law of Three: two fundamental forces, Holy Affirming and Holy Denying, interact and in the interaction produce a third, Holy Reconciling, which actually transcends the other two. The second is the Law of Seven, or the Law of Octaves. This describes a discrete number of steps being required for each process of development in any being or process. Interestingly, it appears to be modelled on the harmonic minor scale, with the two “shocks” (the addition of additional energy) being required along the way in order for the being to rise from “do” to the “do” of the higher octave matching the two semitones intervals of the scale (Blake 255–256). What is of particular relevance here is that Gurdjieff is describing this universal process of development in musical terminology. For Gurdjieff, music was not incidental, but intimately tied up with the underlying structure of existence. Again, we will return to this idea later.

In some respects, Gurdjieff was not able to transmit his ideas particularly well to the broader public, as evidenced by his comparative obscurity compared to, say, Aleister Crowley. He was not able to create a permanent institution, nor did his ideas produce a recognizably “religious” tradition, and the series of writings he undertook late in his career—*Beelzebub's Tales to his Grandson* (1950), *Meetings with Remarkable Men* (1963) and the unfinished *Life is Real Only Then, When I Am* (1975)—are by turns hagiographic, deliberately obfuscatory and incomplete. However, Gurdjieff placed a great emphasis on the importance of a direct student-teacher relationship, and so perhaps unsurprisingly it is through those of his students who took up the mantle that the Work has continued to be taught.

### III J. G. Bennett

John Godolphin Bennett (1897–1974) is—along with Maurice Nicoll (1884–1953)—the most influential transmitter of Gurdjieff’s teachings and techniques in the UK. It must be noted at the outset that Bennett’s work is often seen as

heterodox and of dubious lineage by the main body of Gurdjieffians (Thomson 12). Bennett initially positioned himself with Ouspensky over Gurdjieff when the two broke off relations in 1924, although Bennett's group was not immediately authorized by Ouspensky. In 1945, however, all contact between Bennett and Ouspensky was broken off (Thomson 27), and Bennett spent the final three years of Gurdjieff's life studying under him in Paris. Prior to his death on 29 October 1949, Gurdjieff named Bennett as his representative in England in the United Kingdom, along with René Zuber in France and John, Lord Pentland in the United States, with overall responsibility being passed to Madame de Salzmann (Thomson 21). Yet Bennett also broke with de Salzmann in 1953. So Bennett can be seen as having both a strong claim to direct transmission of Gurdjieff's teachings, and a somewhat heterodox position within the larger Gurdjieffian circle.

Like Gurdjieff, Bennett travelled widely and was involved with a number of different teachers and groups over his life. Bennett's personal demeanor and his style of teaching was certainly more reserved than Gurdjieff's, however, without any of the self-mythologizing, sarcasm, or deliberate obscurantism. As Fripp himself wrote on the back-cover of Bennett's autobiography, "If a stiff Englishman like Mr. B. could do it, there's hope for the rest of us. In our time and culture we had a teacher who went through all the steps himself, took the leap, and came back to explain how we could do the same" (in Bennett, *Witness*).

Briefly, Bennett's own "spiritual biography" begins in 1918, when he was blown off his motorcycle by an exploding shell in France. Although apparently in a coma for six days, he claims to have been in some intermediary stage between life and death, aware of voices and seeing his body from the outside. He describes himself as returning "with complete indifference to my own body" (*Witness* 4). He met Gurdjieff in Istanbul c. 1920, where he also met Gurdjieff's best-known pupil and populariser, P. D. Ouspensky, and was immediately impressed by both. In 1923, he stayed at Gurdjieff's Institute at the Prieuré in Fontainebleau for several weeks, which he found a transformative experience, but declined an offer from Gurdjieff to stay for a period of two years. In 1947, he returned to working with Gurdjieff, now living in Paris, and stayed until his death in October 1949. For several years in the late 1950s Bennett was involved with the Subud movement, and in 1960, after recommencing his Fourth Way work, joined the Catholic Church. He taught numerous small groups through the 1960s, while working to reform education through the use of technology (Blake 264).

Bennett's major published work organizing, interpreting, and developing Gurdjieff's ideas was called *The Dramatic Universe*, published in four volumes between 1953 and 1964. It was concerned with reconciling Gurdjieff's ideas with

contemporary ideas in physics—unsurprisingly for a professional engineer, perhaps. It also laid out what Bennett called *systematics*—an organized system of thinking that utilized Gurdjieff's Laws. His solution was to posit an infinite series of "number systems"—oneness, twoness, threeness, and so on—into which scientific and esoteric ideas could be accommodated. Bennett saw this system of number systems as a universal language, and Systematics as a method of thinking within this universal language (Blake 258–263).

Bennett's interpretation of Gurdjieff's system also took a notably millennial position, in keeping with the emerging New Age milieu of the time. In his autobiography he states, "we are in the early stages of the Parousia, the Second Coming of Christ which heralds the end of the present world" (*Witness* iii). Although we might detect it in the title of his first, and subsequently withdrawn work, *The Herald of the Coming Good* (1933 [1988]), Gurdjieff is not generally seen as millennial, but Bennett makes his position obvious in his biography, *Gurdjieff: Making a New World*:

This period is the greatest opportunity that has existed for many thousands of years for the Work [fourth way activity]. Not for thousands of years has there been such a need for people who are able to work. The reason for this is that the transition from one system to another can only come about through the third force [Holy Reconciling]. It cannot come from ... [either] ... the governed or the power possessors.

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In October 1971, the seventy-four-year-old Bennett founded the International Academy for Continuous Education, at Sherborne House, a former boys' school in Gloucestershire, England, which would remain open until 1976. It offered a ten-month course running from October to August, designed and run by Bennett, intended to both transform the consciousness of its participants and to act as a prototype of the transformed communities that would flourish following the predicted imminent collapse of civilization. Around ninety students attended each year (Blake 245, n. 11). The house was somewhat derelict, and students had to improvise with the facilities they had as they worked upon the building, at the same time as attending lectures, learning Movements and basically working tirelessly (Tamm 98).

Bennett saw this work as taking place within and developing from Gurdjieff's system:

I never doubted that he wished to help me to fulfil my own life's work, and that we were linked together in a common aim, which was to present

to humanity a more acceptable account of Man, the World and God than present-day psychology, science and religion could offer.

*Gurdjieff: Making a New World* 3

Bennett himself claims that Gurdjieff told him that he would "follow in his footsteps and take up the work he had started at Fontainebleau" (*Witness* 372). Bennett taught four courses at Sherborne before his death in December 1974. At this point, however, we must introduce a new theme, and turn our attention to the guitarist in a progressive rock group on the verge of international success.

#### IV King Crimson

Robert Fripp was born in Wimborne, Dorset, in 1946. His father was an estate agent and he has one sister. He took up guitar at age eleven, playing it right-handed despite being naturally left-handed (Tamm 14), a factor which may have influenced his later ferocious picking technique. Despite having considered becoming a priest in early life, he decided to become a professional musician at age seventeen, but when he told his mother, she burst into tears, and he instead worked towards taking over his father's real estate business (30). At age twenty, he abandoned this for a career in music.<sup>4</sup>

He formed King Crimson with childhood friend Michael Giles in 1968, after moving to London.<sup>5</sup> They were joined by vocalist and bassist Greg Lake, saxophonist Ian MacDonald and lyricist, artist and later sound engineer, Pete Sinfield. In July 1969 they opened for the Rolling Stones at their iconic Hyde Park memorial to Brian Jones, and their debut album *In The Court of the Crimson King* was a critical and commercial success, featuring an iconic cover from Sinfield and the group's best known song, *21st Century Schizoid Man*. Lyrically and sonically, the album was highly eclectic, from the surgical terror of *Schizoid Man*, *Moonchild*'s pastoral free jazz to *Epitaph*'s mournfully melodic Mellotron. Lake left during the sessions for the follow-up, however, and Giles and MacDonald soon after. Fripp kept the band running with many personnel changes and declining sales, before disbanding it in early 1972, disappointed with the musical direction it was heading in.

4 Ironically, he has stated that that most of his present wealth comes from the property market in the 1990s, rather than his music career.

5 Interestingly (and apparently coincidentally) King Crimson is a rough translation of the Arabic Beelzebub.



The group returned in late 1972 with a radically different line-up. The saxophone was replaced with David Cross's violin, and Bill Bruford's crisp kit drums were counterpointed with *avant-garde* percussion from Jamie Muir. Sinfield was not rehired: a new lyricist and artist distanced the group even further from their associations with (often somewhat twee) psychedelia. The new line-up emphasised improvisation from the start, but of a style which eschewed any of the blues or jazz forms which typified the "jam sessions" of the period. Due to the unusual line-up, the group were able to produce a wide range of musical palettes, evinced on their debut *Lark's Tongues in Aspic* (1973) which, despite featuring some beautifully delicate song-writing (*Book of Saturday, Exiles*), mostly consists of instrumentals which are still astonishing in their complexity and sonic variety today.

Muir left when the album was completed, without telling the other members why: he had been experiencing out-of-body and (I quote) "spiritual" experiences since discovering Yogananda's *Autobiography of a Yogi* around 1970, and felt that the group was distracting him from a path of spiritual awakening.<sup>6</sup> As drummer Bruford wryly observes, "it seemed you had a better chance of a spiritual awakening in these bands than getting a decent cup of tea" (64). The remaining four took to the road on a series of long tours interspersed with recording sessions. These were exhausting and brought tensions again to the fore. Nevertheless, they were becoming a popular live act in the US, at a time when AOR (Adult Oriented Rock) stations were emerging as a force on FM radio. The line-up's second album was a mixture of live and studio recordings (Smith 178), and violinist David Cross left prior to sessions for a third, citing unhappiness with being increasingly sidelined as the keyboard player in a touring rock band (Various 63).

Fripp's diaries from the time point to a man already with a firm interest in alternative forms of knowledge. The entries for 27 June–2 July 1974 (collected in the booklet accompanying the live King Crimson boxed set, *The Great Deceiver*) recount a series of misfortunes which he suspected to have befallen the group as a result of a ouija board he had been given, and which he would finally throw into New York's East River (Various 12–23). Bruford, noting Fripp's interest in Carlos Castaneda, Wicca and magic, quipped "I wasn't given a set list when I joined the group, more a reading list" (145–146). Describing King Crimson as a form of magic, Fripp famously stated in a 1973 *Rolling Stone* interview that "King

6 Smith 171. It may be of interest to progressive rock aficionados that Muir introduced Jon Anderson of Yes to Yogananda's book, which would later become the conceptual theme of Yes's 1973 double album *Tales from Topographic Oceans*, a watershed of the genre for those on both sides of the fence (Bruford 71–72).

Crimson ... is a magical act ... Every thought or act is a magical act. You don't sit down and work spells and all that hokey stuff. It's simply experimentation with different states of consciousness and mind control" (Crowe). Despite his reserved, intellectual manner, then, Fripp was every bit as involved with alternative religious ideas as more flamboyant and well-known figures such as Led Zeppelin's Jimmy Page or David Bowie.

The remaining three commenced recording sessions for what would become *Red* on 8 July 1974. The tracks were guitar-centric and the heaviest the group had produced yet, though a number of former members were called upon to add further instrumentation and flesh out the trio, including David Cross and sax player Ian MacDonald (Smith 193–194). As recording began, however, Fripp informed Wetton and Bruford that he intended to "withhold the passage of his opinion" (Smith 192)—a significant change from his former, apparently often dictatorial approach. The album was eventually completed without his involvement by Wetton and engineer George Chkiantz (Bruford 64). Nevertheless, the album is widely regarded as one of their finest, and its compositions have been a staple of King Crimson's live performances ever since. Once *Red* was completed, however, Fripp again disbanded the group, despite the protestations of Bruford and Wetton.

## v Fripp and Bennett

What Wetton and Bruford were unaware of was that four days prior to beginning to record *Red*, Fripp had discovered the work of J. G. Bennett. In fact, Fripp would not publicly disclose the experience and the reasons for his abandonment of King Crimson for five years, until 1979 (Tamm 76). Nevertheless, the impact upon him was profound:

I had a glimpse of something ... The top of my head blew off. That's the easiest way of describing it. And for a period of three to six months, it was impossible for me to function ... My ego went. I lost my ego for three months. We were recording 'Red' and Bill Bruford would say, 'Bob-what do you think?' And I'd say, 'Well-' and *inside* I'd be thinking, how can I know anything? Who am I to express an opinion? And I'd say—'Whatever you think, Bill ...'.

qtd. TAMM 76

Indeed, there is a distinct millennial tone to some of Fripp's observations of the time:

The old world was dead. How could I be part of the new one? That was my problem. It was a very fast flash that kept on reverberating for three days and put me out of phase for nearly three months. Recording Red was very painful for me.

BLUM

For Fripp, the trigger was reading the text of Bennett's "Second Inaugural Lecture," given at Sherbourne House in 1972:

I knew that I had to go to the International Academy for Continuous Education at Sherborne, and abandoned my career—as Crimson was about to be hugely successful in Europe—to do so. This was not a product of considered reflection: it was an immediate and instantaneous recognition of necessity.<sup>7</sup>

Fripp did in fact attend the Fifth Course session at Sherbourne House, which ran from October 1975 to August 1976, in which a number of former students (including Anthony Blake and Bennett's son Ben) stepped in to teach and to keep the Institute running. Fripp described the experience as gruelling: attendees rose at six a.m. (four-thirty, if on kitchen duty); psychological exercises began at six forty-five, and practical labor began at eight-thirty. This was on top of lectures and movements (Pritchard and Brooman). The house was cold and cramped, and residents were only allowed to leave for one day every three weeks, and on top of this, Fripp's girlfriend had recently left him, and he reported feeling suicidal (Tamm 99–100). Nevertheless, he completed the course and now describes this period in terms of great gratitude, and certainly as a pivotal point in his life (Pritchard and Brooman).

Fripp returned to active musical work in 1977, now steeped in Bennett's ideas. Based in New York and styling himself as a "Small Intelligent Mobile Unit," he produced and recorded with an eclectic (and frequently highly acclaimed) selection of groups and musicians including Peter Gabriel, David Bowie, Blondie, and Daryl Hall. His plan, which he referred to as 'The Drive to 1981,' was to create situations creating music which were simultaneously be educational, fun and socially useful, as well as earning a living (Tamm 101). During this time, he also worked with Frippertronics, a system using two tape machines and a guitar to produce improvised but densely layered, almost sym-

7 <http://www.dgmlive.com/diaries.htm?artist=&show=&member=3&entry=1517> (accessed 24/08/2016).

phonic soundscapes, which was developed with Brian Eno in the early 70s. Frippertronics enabled him to perform solo without being "unplugged," but also in contexts not traditional to rock musicians, including cafes, galleries, and cathedrals. He also recorded a curate's egg solo album called *Exposure*, which mixes *music concrete* with ambient soundscapes and angular rock instrumentals, involving musicians including Daryl Hall, Peter Gabriel, and Phil Collins. It features a number of recordings of Bennett speaking, most notably on a haunting suite which juxtaposes Bennett's warning of an imminent global catastrophe with Peter Gabriel's *Here Comes the Flood* and a Frippertronic entitled *Water Music*.<sup>8</sup>

Eventually, he formed a new group with former King Crimson drummer Bruford and two Americans, guitarist/vocalist Adrian Belew (formerly of Frank Zappa's band and Talking Heads) and bassist Tony Levin (who shares a striking, and I maintain, possibly not coincidental, resemblance to Gurdjieff). The group first toured as Discipline, but had become King Crimson by the time they released *Discipline* in 1981. *Discipline* is a remarkable break from their earlier work, in a number of ways. Firstly, it eschews long tracks and (mostly) instrumentals. Secondly, it uses a good deal of then cutting-edge electronics to produce an unusual sonic palette, including electric drums, chorused and delayed guitars (rather than distortion the more typical in rock recordings), and the Chapman Stick (a two-handed instrument that covers the range of conventional guitars and bass). Stylistically, the music straddles New Wave and progressive rock, marrying the formal experimentation and complexity of the latter to the energy and clean lines of groups like Television and Talking Heads, with whom Belew had previously been working.<sup>9</sup> While Frippertronics makes an appearance, the principle guitar style of the album is based on paired interlocking rhythmic lines—for example, one guitar plays a pattern in 4/4 and the other in 7/8, dropping one quarter note from the pattern (*Frame By Frame*), or one guitar plays a 5/8 pattern while the rest of the group play in 4/4 (*Theela Hun Ginjeet*). This creates a mathematically strict but constantly-shifting musical vista. Importantly, however, *Discipline* effectively utilizes these innovations

8 The album also includes three seconds of silence which Fripp alleges is Bennett's 45-minute First Inaugural Address to Sherborne House sped up so it was raised an inaudible 6500 octaves (Tamm 113).

9 With hindsight, of course, there was no clean break between progressive rock and punk/post-punk/New Wave as insiders would have us think, yet Fripp's work of this period utilizes the qualities of both equally, which arguably no other group emerging from psychedelia managed. While Yes and Genesis would also have significant revivals in the 1980s, both were commercial, rather than critical, successes, and at the expense of their former credibility.

within melodic and concise songwriting from Adrian Belew. They played no material from previous King Crimson albums in their live sets.

The links to Gurdjieff and Bennett are not as clear as on *Exposure*, perhaps because Adrian Belew was responsible for the lyrics, but they are still identifiable. The title *Discipline* invokes the idea of the Work, and particularly of the ideal of creating in oneself, through disciplined practice, conditions to allow music to “come through,” as it were. Moreover, the pieces are deliberately difficult to perform, and on tracks such as *Frame by Frame* or *Discipline*, Fripp plays a constant ostinato of semiquavers, showing remarkable stamina and concentration. Inasmuch as he shuns any obviously “showy” playing, and instead plays in a subtle but incredibly demanding style, we might even say that Fripp’s performances are deliberate suffering. Furthermore, Fripp’s insistence on eschewing conventional recording techniques are a realization of “the terror of the situation.” This has been echoed in live performances, where the audience is urged (sometimes forcefully) to become part of the situation, rather than a passive observer of the spectacle, through the banning of photography or his Frippertronics performances in unconventional venues such as museums and bookshops. As such, Fripp sees musical performance—live or in the studio—as “not the creation of subservience by the techniques of dominance but rather as an expression of mutual responsibility on the part of the band and audience for the musical potential available in any event” (Pritchard and Brooman).

Furthermore, it would be possible to argue that the geometric complexities of Fripp’s compositions on the album are an attempt at *objective music*. Objective music, according to Gurdjieff, was that composed according to geometric, mathematical laws so as to produce a specific effect upon the listener. Indeed, it could affect dead matter: “there can be such music as could freeze water. There can be such music as would kill a man instantly” (qtd. in Ouspensky 297). Ordinarily, Gurdjieff considered music to be entirely subjective, and produced randomly and haphazardly (49). Fripp takes a similar view: “Whenever a musician’s involved in self-expression, you know it’s gonna suck ... Whenever self-expression’s involved, the musician’s concerned to play the music. When the music plays the musician, things really begin to happen” (qtd. in Tamm 218). This is even more succinct in the Aphorisms: “Mastery acts on what is below. Artistry submits to what is above.” Rather than cold or over-intellectualized, as his critics would paint his music, Fripp’s geometrical compositions are an attempt at “objective art” (Fripp, “Creativity” 33). Fripp writes:

Objective art has nothing whatsoever to do with “self expression,” for example. So, we may find ourselves looking at a building which is an

objective presentation of (shall we say) eternal principles without realising that this building is "art."

A clue: objective "artists" are commonly anonymous, and objective artworks are (typically) the product of a group, or team, or school of "artists" working together.

Another clue: objective art has a functional component. The "artwork" is not a cerebral construct detached from the practice of living; although reflection and mentation is also part of the function of the "artwork."

Another clue: objective art carries a "charge." We may experience this viscerally, although our feelings are particularly responsive to the "message" or "information" presented by / within the "artwork." We may find our feeling responses to "objective art" to be complex, even simultaneously contradictory. Like & dislike, happy & sad, have nothing to do with this.<sup>10</sup>

History would repeat itself. This line-up was, once again, broken up by Fripp after three albums, with Fripp enrolling on a three-month course at the American Society for Continuous Education (ASCE), a Bennett-established community and school in Claymont Court, West Virginia (Tamm 150). Fripp was elected President of the ASCE, and was asked to present a series of guitar seminars, which he accepted on the third time of asking (151). This would gradually develop into Guitar Craft.

## VI Guitar Craft

Fripp's work has shown little or no interest in the larger cosmological issues from Gurdjieff's work, at least, not publicly: there is no mention in guitar craft of Masters, of the Law of Seven or any of Gurdjieff's numerous and distinctive technical terms. Rather, his interest seems to be in the practical aspects of Gurdjieff's ideas, which would be in keeping with their transmission through the practically-minded Bennett. It is my argument that Guitar Craft is a teaching school within the Fourth Way tradition, and of the Bennett lineage specifically, and this section will examine this claim in some detail.

The first Guitar Craft course began 25 March 1985. It was initially intended to be three seminars of five-and-a-half days each, but increased to eight due

10 <http://www.dgmlive.com/diaries.htm?artist=&show=&member=3&entry=1520> (accessed 24/08/2016).

to demand, and then became an on-going program (Tamm 152). By 1990, there had been thirty courses in the US, plus others in the UK, France, Germany, and New Zealand, and at present more than three thousand have participated, with Latin America is the most active center of Guitar Craft activity (152). Fripp was the principal teacher through this period, increasingly assisted by experienced former students.

The idea of using music in the Fourth Way is not so unusual; Gurdjieff was an accomplished musician and performer himself, noted for his improvisations on the harmonium. He had initially intended to introduce his teaching through a ballet, *The Struggle of the Magicians*, and as we have seen, described his Law of Seven in musical terms. He and Thomas de Hartmann (1885–1956) produced a large body of compositions. Fripp, however, claims he has no natural aptitude for the guitar; rather, he claims to have learned it in the way one might learn a foreign language—through hard work. Indeed, he once claimed that he was “not really interested in music,” because “music is just a means of creating a magical state” (Crowe). Yet like Gurdjieff, Fripp seems to see music as a kind of universal language, far preceding human language; in an article published in *Rolling Stone* in 1980, he wrote “for anyone who wishes to go as far, music is a cosmic requirement, it is a direct language common to God and man where subtlety is inevitable” (qtd. in Tamm 127). Music then, for Fripp, is a means to an end, rather than an end in itself.

It would be wrong, therefore, to treat guitar playing as the central point of Guitar Craft. Participants are asked not to play guitar for a week preceding the course (Trinidad), and participants must use a unique tuning, Fripp's own New Standard Tuning, which immediately removes any familiar point of musical reference for experienced guitar players. Moreover, players must use a particular model of acoustic guitar, sit in a particular way, even hold the plectrum and pick in a particular way. This might reflect Gurdjieff's ideas about taking people out of their typical situation in order to rediscover their true selves: “each man has a definite repertoire of roles which he plays in ordinary circumstances ... but put him into even only slightly different circumstances and he is unable to find a suitable role and for a short time he becomes himself” (Ouspensky 239). So despite the emphasis on guitar lessons, the aim is not so much to produce players, but a particular type of attention, as Eric Tamm notes (11). In Fripp's own words, a guitar technique that is a “way of life. More akin to yoga than formal guitar technique, actually an approach to living” (qtd. in Tamm 151). More poetically, he writes, “In tuning a note, we are tuning ourselves” (Fripp, *Guitar Craft*).

Guitar Craft courses are clearly modelled on Bennett's Sherborne, itself modelled upon Gurdjieff's Priory. Participants undertake housework on top

of their musical activities, as well as relaxation exercises, movements and public performance. Meals are communal, and vegetarian,<sup>11</sup> drugs and tobacco forbidden, and students are not permitted to leave the grounds during the seminar (Tamm 159). There are lectures and discussions and manual work, and sleep deprivation is also a feature (163–164). Fripp even attempted to establish a residential school, along the lines of the Prieuré, purchasing Red Lion House in Cranborne, Dorset. From 1986 to 1989 it was open to Crafty Guitarists to become residents and develop their practice long-term, for a share of expenses and a contribution to the upkeep (Tamm 197). However, a neighbor protested having a music school established, and Fripp put the building up for sale.

Guitar Craft also utilizes a set of aphorisms, just as Gurdjieff had at the Prieuré. Indeed, many of them clearly reflect a Gurdjieffian influence. "Things are not as bad as they seem. They are worse than that. They are also better than that" invokes Gurdjieff's comments on realizing "the Terror of the situation" from *Beelzebub's Tales*. Gurdjieff said, "Every grown up man consists entirely of habits, although he is often unaware of it and denies having any habits at all ... The struggle with small habits is very difficult and boring, but without it self-observation is impossible" (qtd. in Tamm 88). Fripp writes, succinctly: "It is impossible to underestimate the power of habit." "Suffering of quality is never obvious to others" clearly invokes Gurdjieff's "intentional suffering." Another says "Suffering is our experience of the distance between what we are and who we wish to become," and another simply, "Suffer cheerfully."<sup>12</sup>

The specifically musical instruction of Guitar Craft also seems designed to break habits of playing. For instance, the Circulation exercise informs students to pick a note from a specific series, and to play it only when they are ready. They may then contribute others as they see fit. The idea being that they involve intentionality in a new way. Sometimes these exercises will degenerate into strumming, at which point Fripp will typically end it, and restart. Each day also involves lengthy group lessons which build from positional and picking exercises into Fripp compositions, many of which can be heard on the various League of Crafty Guitarists albums, and in some cases, later King Crimson albums (for example, *Thrak*). Using Tamm's breakdown of the practical aspects of the Work, outlined above (90–92), I will now briefly demonstrate how each of these aspects is mirrored in the teaching in Guitar Craft seminars.

11 Trinidad describes the specifics of the food in some detail.

12 All aphorisms quoted from Fripp, *Guitar Craft*.



### *Relaxation*

Relaxation exercises have been a consistent feature of Fripp's own practice since the first days of Guitar Craft. At seminars, students are encouraged to begin the day (and performances) with relaxation exercises, and there are daily group exercises led by a qualified instructor (Tamm 160). Alexander Technique, which encourages participants both to relax and to become more aware of their bodies and posture, is also frequently offered (yoga was also offered at some early seminars but soon dropped) (162–163). Fripp has stated in his diary that he aims to be completely relaxed in all parts and at all times except for where he wants to deliberately do work—for example, completely relaxing his body except for his hands and arms during performances to ensure his full energy and concentration goes into his musical performance.

### *Division of Attention*

Again, what might be seen as simply musical technique is marshalled in Guitar Craft to teach this aspect of the Fourth Way. There are numerous exercises in Guitar Craft literature which instruct students on splitting their attention onto two different rhythmical figures at the same time, typically beginning with clapping exercises and gradually moving towards group guitar performances. As Tamm describes, the exercise is not aimed at simply being able to tap a rhythm in five with one hand and a rhythm in four with the other, but “actually *feeling* both metrical cycles simultaneously—a true division of attention” (190). This has also been a frequent feature of King Crimson's music since their 1980s line-up.<sup>13</sup>

### *Co-ordination of the ‘Centers’*

In *Creativity: Finding the Source*, Fripp suggests that create a more consistent and productive relationship with the Muse—encouraging moments where inspiration simply flows—by developing a “threefold discipline of the hands, the head and the heart” (Fripp, “Creativity”). Indeed, “The musician has three disciplines: the disciplines of the hands, the head and the heart” is one of the GC Aphorisms (Fripp, *Guitar Craft*). The hands signified an understanding of the body, “using it in a relaxed way, breathing and developing a sense of oneself”; the head signified not only the intellectual aspects of musical theory, but also awareness of intellectual processes and “the division of attention”; and for the heart, he suggests a system of meditation to be able to remained focused on

13 In particular, see *Discipline and Frame by Frame* from *Discipline* (1981) and *Thrak* from *Thrak* (1995).

"our wish to be musicians" (Fripp, "Creativity"). Indeed, as early as 1974, he had stated that "guitar playing, in one sense, can be a way of uniting the body with the personality, with the soul and the spirit" (qtd. in Tamm 151). This is clearly Gurdjieff's harmonious development, the very essence of the Fourth Way.

### *Abstract Symbolism*

Guitar Craft includes an elaborate theoretical system called "Music Systematics," which is delivered primarily as lectures during the seminars, and much of which has been published in the Guitar Craft Monograph series. It establishes the dynamics of the relationships between music, musician, audience, and industry, often in bamboozling detail, but obviously explaining Fripp's position on live performance and his present somewhat antagonistic relationship with the music industry.<sup>14</sup> It is frequently expounded in visual / symbolic forms reminiscent of Ouspensky's exposition of Gurdjieff's ideas, and would appear to be an application of Bennett's own Systematics, which could be described as a "structural method of thinking" (Blake 248). I lack the space to develop this aspect further in this article, however.

### *Conditions*

The major task of the seminar is to prepare the students for a public performance at the end, where as well as performing guitar Craft Themes *en masse*, they would also prepare compositions (sometimes original) in smaller groups, or even solo. These performances were specifically intended to force the students into a "Gurdjieffian situation" in which they could find an opportunity for self-realisation and self-actualisation (Tamm 186). While his onstage demeanor is distant, controlled, even cold, in the smaller groups of guitar craft he takes a more tricksterish demeanor—such as his occasional heckling at the public performances:

At one point, Tom, one of the experienced crafties who led us in the seminar on Mistakes, shrieked at the top of his lungs and ran out of the chapel, only to return a few minutes later with fake exasperation. Another audience member sat in lotus position for most of the performance and

14 A perhaps surprising example might be Fripp's siding with the notoriously explosive Kanye West over the unauthorized sampling on *21st Century Schitzoid Man* on West's 2010 single, *Power*, see <http://www.dgmlive.com/diaries.htm?artist=&show=&member=3&entry=17644> (accessed 24/08/2016).

meditated. Others still were shining LED lights in our faces, or otherwise making silly commentary out-loud.

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As well as Fripp aping Gurdjieff's personal style of teaching, it seems clear that the aim of these interjections is to destabilize the student, and set up conditions for Work. Indeed, the idea that getting irritated by something provides an opportunity for work upon oneself is a commonly heard claim in *Guitar Craft* (Tamm 173, 179–180). Here the importance of the role of the teacher is another clear commonality. Both Gurdjieff and Bennett repeatedly stressed the importance of direct transmission of knowledge from Teacher to Student.

### *Movements*

*Guitar Craft*—unlike more traditional forms of music teaching—puts a great deal of importance on movements. Many of the *Guitar Craft* Exercises involve movement. One example which not only includes movement but integrates it with a number of the other techniques described above is an exercise called *Thrak*. In this exercise, the students begin by clapping a rhythm in unison, before splitting into two groups, each of which claps in a different time signature, although on the same underlying tempo—one group in 5/4, clapping on beats 1 and 4, and the other in 7/4, clapping on beats 1, 4 and 6.<sup>15</sup> After several cycles, however, the bars again align, and the groups come back together.<sup>16</sup> The immediate brutality of the clashing patterns, jokingly underlined by the title, belies the mathematical intricacy of the structure.

Once students have mastered this, however, movements are added. Beginning in a circle, when the music splits, the players (alternating A-B-A-B) begin to move into the center of the circle, then returning to the circumference, in time with their particular time-signature. This creates a visual representation of the musical structure, undulating in two interacting wave forms which finally come back into unison. The overall effect is akin to seeing an interference pattern, such as that of two laser beams producing a three-dimensional hologram, or two notes interacting to create a chord. Essentially, in *Thrak*, two different musical lines compete, producing something more interesting than either would on their own. Whether deliberate or not, this is a fine demonstration of Gurdjieff's

15 According to Trinidad, Fripp sometimes adds a third line playing in 11/4, and hitting beats 1, 4, 7 and 10.

16 An online video showing a special arrangement of the King Crimson piece "Thrak" as performed by a *Guitar Craft* group can be viewed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yMwoGuo-MPo> (accessed 25/08/2016).

Law of Three; Holy Affirming, Holy Denying, with the higher order of Holy Reconciling emerging from the interplay.

This exercise was later used as the basis of a 1994 King Crimson composition, performed by the "double trio" lineup, which featured two drummers, two bassists, and two guitarists. In essence, two trios were playing the same melody in different meters. Fripp would also produce several albums of Guitar Craft recordings—some of which references Gurdjieff or Bennett in the titles of pieces, for example "the Moving Force" on 1988's *Get Crafty!*

## VII Conclusion: Fripp as Teacher of the Fourth Way

This article has discussed some of the many ways in which the work of J. G. Bennett and G. I. Gurdjieff have influenced the work of Robert Fripp. It is clear that the influence has been profound, not only in terms of the ideas being expressed, but in the manner in which they are imparted. Out of necessity, these discussions have been somewhat brief, and there is certainly more scope for further research; although I have focused primarily on Guitar Craft here, much more could be written about Fripp's compositions, and on Music Systematics, and I will perhaps return to these in a future work.

To conclude, I would like to make a few observations about how Fripp and Guitar Craft, and their relationship to Bennett and Gurdjieff, are relevant to the study of new and alternative religion. Firstly, Guitar Craft is an example of what we might call a "discrete" transmission of teaching. Not only is it not immediately obvious that it is based on Gurdjieff and Bennett's ideas, its aims are primarily or entirely practical. One could get a great deal of benefit from a Guitar Craft seminar without the slightest (conscious) involvement with Fourth Way material, or any concern with alternative religious ideas. Indeed, it is striking that at no point are these ideas referred to as 'religious,' or even 'spiritual.' Much as Gurdjieff and Bennett might be the object of study for Religious Studies more so than any other discipline, we must acknowledge that this is not how those involved in it typically understand their activities. Nor do I think my description has been impoverished by not feeling the need to enforce such categories.

It is to be noted, however, that this is an elite transmission of Gurdjieff's ideas. Although critically acclaimed, King Crimson have rarely bothered the popular music charts, and their influence upon the general public comes largely through their influence upon more popular groups, including Nirvana and Radiohead. This is a pattern we have seen in other new religious traditions, for example Theosophy (see Introvigne) or Discordianism (see Robertson)—

although numbers of adherents remain small, the cultural transmission of the ideas to the broader public through popular artworks is high, even if these are “discrete” transmissions. Furthermore, while Fripp acknowledges Bennett’s influence, he does not seem particularly concerned with whether he is a legitimate successor—there is no sense of an apostolic lineage, rather, Fripp is making use of what he was taught in a way that he sees as most useful and most suited to his own strengths and skills. That said, his “apostolic status” is constantly being asserted in subtle ways, from his noting that some Gurdjieffians see Guitar Craft as legitimate, or his insistence that students do not necessarily need a direct authorisation from the teacher.

Fripp remains involved with the Bennett Foundation, though his role at present is primarily to do with the restoring and archiving of Bennett’s recorded lectures. In 2012 and 2013, he represented the Bennett estate in a dispute over publishing rights with Bennett Books in the US, concerning their publication of electronic editions of several of Bennett’s works.<sup>17</sup>

However, as I was writing this article, Robert Fripp announced the conclusion of Guitar Craft:

To Those Who Know And Who Are Known ...

The Guitar Craft Workshop is in process of being dismantled.

Guitar Craft, The Guitar Circle, The League Of Crafty Guitarists and The Orchestra Of Crafty Guitarists will cease to exist on Sunday 25th. March, 2017.

In a traditional model, apprentices served in a workshop, grew in personal stature, capacity and understanding, left the place of their instruction, and moved out into the world to establish a studio or workshop of their own, or form a partnership with others.

Perhaps some of you feel called upon to continue to act in service to the creative current we recognize acting in and through Guitar Craft and its several forms. You have my support and encouragement.

If this is so, put your own name, and/or find the right name, for that work. It is legitimate to present your lineage; and the extent, degree and participation in Guitar Craft and Guitar Circle courses, projects and activities. It is illegitimate for anyone to claim authorization or mandate, moving forwards, to formally represent and/or direct forms of Guitar Craft and The Guitar Circle.

17 <https://www.dgmlive.com/diaries.htm?entry=23080> (accessed 23/08/2016).

I have seen claims made, in the professional arena, to have been a student of Robert Fripp. No "student of Robert Fripp" would claim to be a student of Robert Fripp.

*Robert Fripp*

Sunday 12th. June, 2016<sup>18</sup>

Here, Fripp passes on the baton of the Bennett lineage of the Gurdjieff Work, giving anyone the right to use the teaching as they see fit, but rejects that they should identify as officially succeeding Guitar Craft. This is fitting, as he himself has never claimed to be a successor to Bennett, nor was he recognized as such by Bennett. Nevertheless, he has been one of the most visible teachers of the Work in the world for over thirty years, and his work, with King Crimson and with Guitar Craft, constitutes a complex and sincere artistic emanation of the Fourth Way, despite its unfamiliar garb.

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<sup>18</sup> <http://dgmilive.com/news.htm?entry=5540> (accessed 24/08/2016).

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